

Prayers were also believed efficacious. As soon as a person became sick, his people prayed to God to help him and cure him. In addition, the priest prayed for the sick individual in the church (or in the home if the sick person could not go to the church) asking God to cure his servant from such and such a sickness and to give him peace. Candles were burned when the prayers were being said, but the burning of these candles was not supposed to have any curative power. "This service is performed more for the old people and although it is said to be *vetur rabota* [plumb foolishness], yet many times it helps the sick to recover. Nowadays people do not believe in God and this is why many people die, and also that is why life in general is as it is, so heavy."

In looking for the causes of illness the peasants also turned to the Almighty who, it was formerly believed, sent sickness as a punishment upon individuals for wrongs they had done. While many people in 1937 had the same attitude, there were some who accepted the germ explanation. But even some of these, if a sickness dragged on and on, suspected that God might be meting out some punishment, germs or no germs. Here was the way they so often put it: "And God has the right to punish the people, for now they have begun not to believe in him and not to listen to him. Now the people are forgetting God and are with the Devil."

The villagers knew the names of only a few diseases and classified all illnesses under one of these few. The worst disease was the "plague" (typhoid fever), then tuberculosis, *sharka* (pox), scarlatina, and finally, "a bad cold." The doctor used a more scientific classification in listing the causes of death. Her report for 1936 showed that thirty-three people died within the year. Diseases accounting for four deaths each were tuberculosis, nervous disorders, and pneumonia; those accounting for two deaths each were scarlatina, whooping cough, diphtheria, cancer, heart disease, old age, and childbirth (mother); those causing one death each were childbirth (infant), typhus, erysipelas, bronchitis, diarrhea, digestive ailment, and accident. Her scientific approach did not necessarily mean that the doctor's recovery percentage was very high, because patients were brought too late for proper treatment. Therefore the peasants said: "And

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be divided into something like natural diseases and super-natural ones. The latter are called *vila* diseases, 'treacherous' (*neverne*) diseases, and diseases 'put on' (*nametnute*) by magic or the evil eye.

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If one goes outside at night in an evil hour, or makes water at night in an unclean place (he should as a safeguard spit first three times) and after he fall ill, he is said to have come upon evil (*uradisa*). The cure at Libjahovo is to wash him with unbroken water and throw the water outside the house saying: 'From the dung heap you came, to the dunghill return, gentle and honied ones.' Or else let the unfortunate man take a cake smeared with honey and put it on the place where he thinks that he caught the disease to *appease the 'urama'*.<sup>1</sup> Such offerings are to be made should one urinate under an old rose bush or any other tree, and afterwards be troubled by pains in the back and head and legs. In the Nišava district for this kind of disease (*ogradisanje*), the woman doctor (*bajalica*) sprinkles the place with sherbet on a sprig of hyssop, and at the same time beseeches those who have sent the illness to remove it *in return for this rich gift*.<sup>2</sup> Honey or honey water is the usual libation, and honey is one of the traditional offerings to the *vile*.

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*Namera* is used rather in the same sense, as well as to signify an ill-wished misfortune or an evil eye. Diagnosis of these diseases can be made from the clothes worn by the patient when he caught it, or by bringing certain things—flowers, nails, horseshoes, a glass of wine, water, salt, and food—either to the spot in question or to trees commonly associated with spirits, such as roses, blackthorns, willows, etc. A prayer is generally addressed to the spirits or to the tree. It is common to leave the offerings over night, and if the next day they have been in any way disturbed, a leaf fallen into the wine or what not, it is clear that the man has been enchanted.

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The offerings can serve afterwards as a medicine.

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Distinguished from ill-wishing and spell casting in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S.E.Z. xii, p. 445; Sb.N.U. (1926), p. 162; GLZ.M. p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> V. M. Nikolić, *Iz Lučnice i Nišave* (1910), p. 278.

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In Bulgaria at the feast of the *Rusalje* or *Samovile*, *Vile*—the date varies, but Ascension Day will do as an example—on the eve of the feast a person suffering from a *vila* disease went to a field near water where the *Vila's* plant—*Rosen*, Dittany—grew, with someone of the opposite sex, who was willing to become a brother or sister. An offering of food and wine was made, and one of the flowers was balanced over a new vessel of unbroken water, beside which the sick person lay down and slept while the other watched. After one o'clock the flowers were supposed to fade, and the watcher covered the pot with a new cloth. The next morning before dawn the position of the flower was inspected to see whether it had been visited by the spirit and the sick person drank the water with anything that had fallen into it overnight.<sup>1</sup>

In Bosnia<sup>2</sup> a person who had fever went down to a running stream with a coal from the fire and a piece of garlic, and called on the name of the last member of the family who had died: 'Oh, So-and-So! When you arise and light a fire from this coal and eat this head of garlic then may fever take hold of me!' and he threw the coal and the garlic into the water. (Similar rites in Serbia repeat the throwing of coals and garlic into water and a similar formula but without mention of a dead relative.) Or, having split a young willow branch and made a hoop of it or of a stem of nettle, he drew it over his head and off at his feet. Then he cut notches in the stem to the number of attacks of fever that he had had, counting: 'One fever, two fevers . . .'. Then counting backwards he cut out the notches, and the hoop was hung up behind the fire to dry, just as in Serbia, after the redeemer has helped his brother through a rose-tree hoop, the latter is hung up in the chimney or under the eaves for forty days and after forty days it is floated away down a river or buried.

It is worth noting that one of the formulae for redemption occurs on other occasions. In order to preserve a new-born child a hole is dug in the ground where its head first touches

<sup>1</sup> D. Marinov, *op. cit.* 1; V. N. Čolakov, *Bulgariski narodni Sbornik*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> T. Dragičević, in *Gl.Z.M.* xxi.

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751 the earth. Then the 'head' of a spindle, a silver coin, a piece  
944 of gold and the sole of an old shoe which has been picked  
up anywhere are put in the hole, and the women say three  
times: 'Earth, Mother-God! I give you head for head, body  
for body, gold for gold, money to buy the slave from the  
grave and a sole for security.'<sup>1</sup>

● <sup>B</sup>  
782 Redemption may be one of the fundamental notions of  
755 sacrifice. In Thrace a black ram is selected to be the substitute (*namesnik*) of a sick man, and is killed and eaten ritually.<sup>2</sup>

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755 In the Rhodopes a black ram was tied to the corpse of someone who had died of a pestilence; its eyes were bandaged and then it was set free and driven into another village.<sup>3</sup>  
At Grlšte<sup>4</sup> a black chicken is ritually killed and eaten by each household during an epidemic of dysentery and so on.

782 Passing to other sacrificial rites, to avoid confusion, I shall take as the criterion of a sacrifice a dedicatory specification or intention. All forms of sacrifice are known—libation; blood offering without fire; the laying of objects at a shrine; feeding to a creature or spirit; alms-giving; sin offerings; scape offerings; communion meals; and so on. Burnt offering is less well authenticated. There is evidence to show that burnt offering was probably known amongst the early ancestors of the Slavs, but the burnings of more recent date are doubtfully sacrificial. The early Slavs made sacrifice of men, animals, fruit, flowers, grain, honey, milk, etc., to the higher gods, the spirits of the underworld, the ancestors, and to nature spirits. Procopius mentions oxen and other beasts sacrificed to the god of the universe and of thunder, which Trojanović connects with modern instances of oxen dedicated to St Elijah and eaten communally. Sacrifices to nature spirits are of particular interest here, since with their cult popular medicine retains an intimate link. The Eastern Slavs

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Mijatović, *Narodna Medicina u Srba Seljaka u Leci i Temišcu*, S.E.Z. xiii; T. Djordjević, *Utišaj* (1897); Miodragović, *Gradja za narodnu Pedagogiju*, pp. 64, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sb.N.U. iii, 275.

<sup>3</sup> S. Šukov, *Rodopski Starini*, i (1867), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> S. Trojanović, *Glavni Srpski Žrtveni Običaji* (1911), p. 39.

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<sup>The Eastern Slavs</sup>  
had a sacred tree to which they sacrificed and where they made and registered vows, which recalls the South Slav custom of *zavetine* when the tree's roots are sometimes sprinkled with blood or a common meal is partaken of beneath its branches. The Vlahs of the Timok district in spring kill a lamb under the village tree and allow the blood to run into a hole dug at its roots. In the Bulgarian life of St Theodosius (from the Greek of the fourteenth century) a certain Theodorit, a follower of the Massalian (?) heretic Akindin, set up an oak-tree cult at Trnovo, where people worshipped and sacrificed sheep to the tree for the sake of their health.<sup>1</sup> An old South Slav gloss reads: 'Not only should the forms of idols be destroyed and razed and altars, that is temples, dug up, but no trace of idolatrous worship remain in any place or in forests or in oak-tree groves or in trees....'

Vuk mentions a ghost (*sjenovito*) tree at Grbalje, which, if anyone cut, he will sicken to the end of his days. He should therefore with the same axe cut off a hen's head, holding the bird over the stump of the tree.

When a sheep or goat died, if it had had young, the body was hung by Hercegovinian shepherds on a tree, and left there to decay, since this prevented more deaths in the flock, and also encouraged the fertility of the tree.

The legend of sacrifice to a pestilential dragon or demon is universal, and there are grounds for thinking that human sacrifices to lake and river demons existed amongst the South Slavs to purify a village or district. This is borne out by numerous local traditions of the kind.

In Old Serbia the guardian of lakes is believed to be a bull, to whom an offering of money must be thrown before beginning the sheep washing, and on this occasion the shepherds fire guns. There are innumerable local customs of blood, plant, money and grain sacrifices to streams for the sake of cattle or for rain and fertility. Sometimes images are thrown into the water or simply green boughs, and although these

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Žitje i Eizna prepodob. Otko našeg... Theodarija in Činim of Imp. Obilastvo Istariji i Dromesti Ruzii*, 1 (1860).